

Photo: Matthew Newton

The Vale of Belvoir

“The securing of this valley would be the Tasmanian conservation triumph of the 21st century.” Professor Jamie Kirkpatrick

View of Cradle Mountain from the Vale of Belvoir

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The TLC campaign to raise funds for the purchase and management of the Vale of Belvoir is now underway.

The Vale of Belvoir is framed by the far northern ridges of Tasmania's South- West World Heritage Area, close to Cradle Mountain. This beautiful valley is one of Tasmania's conservation jewels.

Viewed from a spur of grass and rocky outcrops a hundred metres or so above the Vale of Belvoir's valley floor, it is easy to see why. At the southern end of the valley lies a lake, mirror smooth, reflecting the last patches of winter snow on the surrounding hills. Trickling from the lake a tiny creek is visible snaking north along the wide open valley floor; but this small creek is deceptive, the rock below ground is limestone and honeycombed with caves and underground streams. At intervals the creek is fed from deep pools of mysterious turquoise where the water wells up from deeper underground. By the time the watercourse tumbles out of the valley to the north it has earned its title of the Vale River.

There are no trees on the valley floor, it is naturally treeless and has been so for tens of thousands of years.

The banks of the river harbour an ecosystem in miniature. Dense mats of tiny herbs and wildflowers known as tufa herbfields fringe the river bank, and are nourished by its alkaline, lime-rich waters. These herbfields are extremely rare and exquisite.

Sweeping out from the riverbanks the valley floor is a native grassland. Tussocks of poa grass ripple in the wind and the spring wildflowers are already visible in the spaces in between. Around the edges of many round sinkholes, created by the underlying limestone caves, are profusions of delicate wildflowers. For some of these wildflowers this habitat is their most important refuge in the world. Later in the summer Ptunarra brown butterflies will flit between the grass tussocks, one of this threatened species' most significant habitats.

Grasslands like these, intensely rich in plant and animal diversity, were rare even before Europeans set foot in Tasmania. Now, after many have been converted for farming, they are virtually lost. The Vale of Belvoir is one of the finest remaining examples.

During the last ice age there were other valleys like this in south-west Tasmania.

The floor of the Franklin Valley was almost (continued on page 2)



The meandering Vale River



Professor Jamie Kirkpatrick

(continued from page 1)

certainly a grassy plain like this one. However, as the climate warmed, the lower altitude valleys were filled with peat of low fertility and the rich grassland systems have been replaced by poorer buttongrass plains and forests.

The Vale of Belvoir's high altitude cold climate has protected it from a build-up of peat. The original fertile soils are still exposed at the surface, driving an ecosystem teeming with life. It is now the last valley of its kind. The most obvious wildlife here is an enormous population of wombats. From any vantage point on the property one can observe great numbers of the delightful, stocky creatures ambling around and grazing. The numerous native herbivores provide a rich food source for carnivores. The valley is reputed to have the highest density of marsupial carnivores in the world. Evidence of quolls and Tasmanian devils is abundant and some of the last credible sightings of Tasmanian tigers were around this area.

The marsupial carnivores are further assisted by the proximity of forests, where they may take shelter when not scavenging and hunting in the valley. The grasslands are fringed on the valley sides by great walls of old-growth myrtle rainforest. The rapid transition from the bright, exposed and windy landscape of the grassland into the deep, still, cool shade of an ancient forest is breathtaking.

Aboriginal hunters were frequent users of the valley. Early Van Diemens Land Company explorers reported bark huts

in the valley. These first owners would most certainly have burned the grasslands at the end of winter after the winter rains and before the new growth made burning impossible.

European farmers have adopted this cycle of burning which continues to this day. The Charleston family and their predecessors from nearby Wilmot have owned the property since it was granted in the late 1800s. They have used it as summer pasture for sheep and cattle. During the 1930s the property even supported a fully operational dairy during the summer months.

The Tasmanian Land Conservancy has recently developed an agreement with the Charleston family. The land will be purchased by the Land Conservancy and made a reserve to ensure that its conservation values are maintained into the future. Based on advice from many of Tasmania's key conservation scientists we will continue the family's patterns of traditional grazing and burning, which is believed to have assisted the grassland to remain in its near pristine condition.

Further scientific work will assist the Land Conservancy and the Charltons to make decisions about future grazing - how or if it should be continued. In addition, future generations of the family will continue to use the cattlemen's hut on the property to ensure that the family's long and special connection with the Vale is maintained.

We are lucky to be able to draw on advice from our many valued supporters

with scientific and professional reserve management expertise. We are particularly working closely with Jamie Kirkpatrick AM, Professor of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania. Professor Kirkpatrick is one of Australia's pre-eminent conservation scientists and is recognised for pioneering work on reserve system design as well as Tasmanian ecology.

Professor Kirkpatrick has had a very long scientific association with the Vale of Belvoir and with research on grasslands and grazing. Professor Kirkpatrick has stated that "the securing of this valley would be the Tasmanian conservation triumph of the 21st century."

With the ongoing advice of Professor Kirkpatrick and other key scientists we plan to gain a much deeper insight into the effects of grazing and fire on the Vale of Belvoir which will help inform our future decisions for the reserve's management. This is an approach to conservation that lends itself to highly productive parts of the landscape that also have unique conservation values - particularly to places like the Vale of Belvoir where unique conservation values, production and a family's farming heritage coincide.

We need to raise \$600,000 to purchase the property and ensure its future management. If you are able to consider making a donation or would like to know more, please phone the office or use the enclosed compliment slip.

Nathan Males - CEO



Susan Gough



Juvenile Wedge-tailed eagle

Photo: Paul Wilson

Board profile

In 2008 we were very pleased to welcome Susan Gough to our Board. Susan has been practicing as a solicitor specialising in environmental and planning law for over 12 years, with a focus in the energy and infrastructure sectors. She has just completed a Master of Law degree at the Australian Centre for Environmental Law, ANU, specialising in climate law and policy.

“In a state so often characterised by simplistic ‘for’ or ‘against’ environmental debates, I was impressed by the way the TLC manages to chart a clear course through the political divide, building strong, long-term partnerships with key stakeholders and delivering real conservation outcomes. It seemed amazing that in such a short space of time, this small group had built such a big reputation for action.

It was apparent from my first encounter with the TLC, that not only does the organisation have a clear vision for the conservation of natural values within the state, it also has the integrity, expertise, professionalism and driven staff to deliver on its ambitious strategic plan.

I feel strongly that private individuals have an obligation to act, and a vital role to play, in better protecting our state’s incredible biodiversity.

I am truly excited to have joined the TLC Board and look forward to working with the whole TLC team towards helping create a world’s best practice reserve system in Tasmania.”

Susan Gough

Eagle nest protection program

We are incredibly lucky that Tasmania is an island that still has its top bird predators in place. It is an uplifting experience to watch a pair of Wedge-tailed eagles soaring on thermals above the Midlands plain or one of our White-bellied sea eagles observing the water from a prominent perch on the shore.

Sadly, the Tasmanian Wedge-tailed eagle is listed as an endangered species under both national and state legislation and the White-bellied sea eagle is listed as vulnerable under the Tasmanian legislation. State experts estimate that only 750 mature Wedge-tailed eagles and less than 1000 mature White-bellied sea eagles remain in Tasmania.

The primary challenge facing our eagles’ ongoing survival is successful nesting and breeding. As our natural landscapes are increasingly fragmented and activity in our forests increases, there are fewer isolated, peaceful nesting sites. Eagle scientists suggest that 20ha of quiet forest around a nest is a good working minimum for a sustainable breeding site. Any disturbance, activity or noise in this zone during breeding season can be a factor in breeding failure. Other ongoing risks to the population are accidental deaths on roads in wind turbines and on power lines.

While collisions of eagles with wind turbines cause some eagle deaths, Roaring 40s (owners and operator of Tasmania’s Woolnorth Wind Farms) is making a major contribution to the state-wide survival of Tasmania’s eagles.

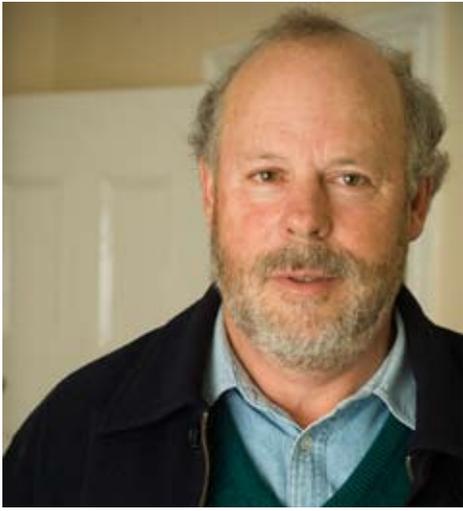
In 2008 the Tasmanian Land Conservancy and Roaring 40s formed a partnership to protect viable nesting sites on private land, and launched the Eagle Nest Protection Program. The partnership was initiated by Roaring 40s to meet their operational requirements and commitment to deliver positive conservation outcomes. The Tasmanian Land Conservancy was enlisted as a key partner and conduit for this work.

Roaring 40s provides the funding for the TLC to operate the Eagle Nest Protection Program, which encourages private landowners to establish protected areas around eagle nesting sites on their properties.

The program began in late February 2008 and already I am in the process of establishing agreements for eleven nest sites and surrounding habitat. The average size of these protected areas is around 30 ha. Providing these larger protected areas with minimal disturbance is an important step towards ongoing survival of the two species.

The Tasmanian Land Conservancy hopes to continue the programme into the future, working with Roaring 40s, other stakeholders and private landowners to make a major contribution towards keeping our majestic eagles soaring in Tasmanian skies.

Leigh Walters
Eagles Program Manager



TLC President - Peter Bosworth

Photo: Matthew Newlon



The Egg Islands - TLC permanent reserve purchased in 2007/8

Photo: Matthew Newlon

TLC conservation highlights of 2007-2008

Tasmania is a world leader in having one of the highest overall levels of conservation reservation of any place in the world. However, this can be misleading as significant elements of our biodiversity are not well represented in this reserve system. Our challenge is to ensure that the reserve system is truly comprehensive, adequate and representative and managed appropriately. This, along with ecologically sustainable management outside of the reserve system, are fundamentals to ensuring the long-term conservation of our island's biodiversity. The TLC continues to make extraordinary contributions to the conservation of biodiversity and natural places across Tasmania.

Our permanent TLC reserve system was enhanced by the addition of the beautiful Egg Islands Reserve. The Egg Islands are part of the delta system of the Huon River and among the state's richest wetlands. I thank the Australian Government's National Reserve System Programme for their contribution towards the purchase of the Egg Islands Reserve, and particularly thank the TLC's many supporters who made specific donations towards this project or supported the purchase through their regular monthly gifts.

Working with government has continued to enhance our conservation programmes.

The Mole Creek Karst Forest Programme has secured eight properties through

purchase or covenant to protect forests and significant limestone cave systems in the Mole Creek area. Two of these properties will be covenanted and resold, while four have been added to the Mole Creek National Park.

The Protected Areas on Private Land Programme, which we operate with the Tasmanian state government, has continued to work with enthusiastic landowners to create private protected areas as part of the National Reserve System. The TLC has now facilitated 2328 ha in 52 private protected areas through this programme. As part of this programme we have also been working with partners Australian Bush Heritage and Department of Primary Industries and Water (DPIW) to develop a landscape scale conservation plan in the Tasmanian midlands.

We were able to secure funds to operate a short but very effective programme, the Midlands Biodiversity Hotspot Tender. This programme enabled landowners to bid for funding to establish private protected areas on their land through covenants or stewardship agreements.

We have also established a new programme to work with the owners of eagles nests on private land. Funded by Roaring 40s, the aim of the programme is to establish eleven new private protected areas around eagles' nesting sites through funding agreements with landowners.

A major step for the TLC was the development of a partnership with the Commonwealth Government's Forest Conservation Fund to establish a revolving fund in Tasmania. The programme was initiated with \$6,000,000, and six properties covering over 1400 ha (including priority and old-growth forest) have been purchased with a view to being covenanted and resold.

Our revolving fund activities in partnership with DPIW and the King Island NRM group are also continuing.

The successes of the 2007-2008 year have been made possible by over 2000 supporters, funding partners, including state and commonwealth governments, board members and staff. Thank you to everyone who has been generous and unwavering in their support of the organisation. It is this core support that makes the organisation's existence and activities possible.

The success of the TLC is also reliant on the use of the best scientific knowledge to plan and deliver its approach to biodiversity conservation and this support also includes the many scientists who assist us in a range of ways. Their contribution is gratefully acknowledged.

2008-2009 is proving to be another year of outstanding conservation outcomes. I hope you will join with me in continuing support for the TLC's work.

Peter Bosworth - President

We are grateful to the following organisations for their support in recent months



FITZGERALD AND BROWNE
Lawyers

